

MINNEAPOLIS CHARTER COMMISSION

PLAIN-LANGUAGE CHARTER REVISION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Minneapolis Charter Commission proposes that the Minneapolis City Charter be amended in the form of a thorough revision. This revision's purpose is *not* restructuring the City government or otherwise effecting any substantive change. Its purpose is only modernizing, simplifying, and uncluttering the Charter, and redrafting its provisions for clarity, brevity, and consistency. When Minneapolis first adopted a home-rule charter in 1920, the first charter commission did not draft a charter from scratch: instead, it simply compiled the special laws then in force affecting the City, and collated them into a loosely organized document that became the first charter. That charter has since undergone about a hundred amendments, often by the City Council, sometimes by referendum, and has now become a highly impractical document: more than 70,000 words long; confusingly organized; full of redundant or conflicting provisions, or provisions long since overridden by statute; cluttered with detail better suited to ordinances; and written in a legalistic style that is more than a century out of date, and practically unintelligible to a nonlawyer (and exceptionally difficult even for lawyers).

The proposed revision reorganizes and rewrites the entire charter, from start to finish, while preserving intact its substance. The revision reorganizes the charter in ten articles, and groups related provisions together. The revision uses plain English.

The revision also reclassifies many provisions from charter to ordinance, without changing the underlying rule. The revision retains a provision in the charter if it affects (1) a citizen's rights, or (2) the relationship among governmental officers or bodies, particularly including (but not limited to) the independence of municipal boards. After four public hearings, the revision contains every provision that any board, citizen, or other interested person or group considered important enough that it belonged in the charter rather than in ordinance.